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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the written accommodation guidelines for students with disabilities in 18 states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) that use graduation examinations. Each state uses a different test; 12 include a writing sample; and all states, with the exceptions of Nevada and North Carolina, have criterion-based tests. A variety of accommodations are allowed when students with disabilities take the exams. A common general guideline is that testing accommodations should be consistent with accommodations used by the student for classroom instruction. Analysis of specific accommodations are organized into four groups: (1) format/equipment accommodations (such as Braille or sign language); (2) scheduling accommodations (extended time, multiple sessions, breaks); (3) setting/administration accommodations (individual administration, interpretation of directions); and (4) response accommodations (use of proctor or scribe, machine, writing responses in test booklet). Most states did not indicate whether the testing results of students using accommodations would be included in the local or state statistics. Guidelines were also rated for clarity, inclusiveness, and organization. Among four recommendations to states are that clear definitions and explanations of each acceptable accommodation should be provided. (DB)

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 5

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Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Guidelines from States with Graduation Exams

Minnesota Children

Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning

306183

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 5

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Guidelines from States with Graduation Exams

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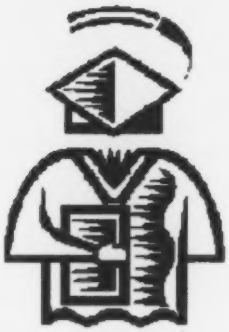

The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards. Specifically, the project will examine ways in which students with limited English and students with disabilities can participate in the Basic Standards Tests of reading, mathematics, and written composition and in the performance-based assessments of the high standards in the Profile of Learning.

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Overview

Education is moving rapidly towards results-based accountability systems that measure the learning of all students. Included in the word "all" are students with disabilities; students with disabilities need to be involved in the assessments that form the basis for accountability. All students, including students with disabilities, need access to diplomas and other life opportunities that assessments provide. There is considerable evidence that this is not the current status of accountability systems and assessment programs in most states. Surveys of state directors of special education (Erickson, Thurlow, Seyfarth, & Thor, 1996) have demonstrated that participation rates are low or unknown. Policies regarding participation in graduation exams are variable (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1996), with some states requiring only the accrual of credits, some states requiring that students pass an exam, and some states requiring only that students meet their IEP goals.

All students, including students with disabilities, need access to diplomas and other life opportunities that assessments provide.

For students with disabilities to participate in assessments, there is the need to determine which students are capable of taking the assessment without accommodations, which students are capable of taking the assessment with accommodations, and which students will need a different assessment (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Vanderwood, 1994). Children with disabilities who require accommodations vary tremendously. For states with graduation exams, or states considering the adoption or development of such exams, accommodation policies are an important part of the accountability picture. The purpose of this report is to examine the policies overseeing the use of accommodations in those states that have high stakes assessments for students.

Method

Sample

Perusal of the guidelines quickly reveals that states use a variety of terms sometimes to mean the same thing, sometimes to mean different things.

Eighteen states were included in this analysis of states' written accommodation guidelines: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The guidelines examined were those that had been compiled by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) (Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995). These were examined for this report specifically for graduation exams within the states (rather than across all tests used in the states). Perusal of the guidelines quickly reveals that states use a variety of terms (*accommodation*, *adaptation*, or *modifications*) sometimes to mean the same thing, sometimes to mean different things (see Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1995). In this report, we do not attempt to maintain any distinctions but instead use the term *accommodations* to include all changes that states allow for students with disabilities.

Each of the 18 states uses a different test for its graduation examination (see Table 1). Twelve states (Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) include a writing sample as part of their testing cycle. All states, with the exception of Nevada and North Carolina, have criterion-based tests. Nevada uses a norm-referenced test; North Carolina uses both criterion-based and norm-referenced tests.

Each state also tests different subject areas. Of nine potential areas of testing (language arts, math, reading, writing, social studies, science, citizenship, English, and foreign language), only New York tests in English and foreign language. The subjects tested the most often were: math (17/18), reading (14/18), and writing (13/18). Hawaii was not

Table 1: Information on State Graduation Exams

State	Name of Test	Subjects Tested										Grades Tested	Norm or Criterion
		LA	M	R	W	SS	SC	CT	EC	E	FL		
AL	High School Basic Skills Exam	X	X	X								11,12	Criterion
FL	High School Competency Test		X	X	X							11	Criterion
GA	GA High School Graduation Tests (Writing Assessment)	X	X		X	X						11	Criterion (Writing Sample)
HI	Test of Essential Competencies								X			10,11, & 12	Criterion
LA	LA Graduation Test Examination	X	X		X	X	X					10,11	Criterion (Writing Sample)
MD	MD Functional Testing Program		X	X	X			X				7-12	Criterion (Writing Sample)
MI	MI Educational Assessment Program		X	X			X					4,5,7,8,11,& 12	Criterion
MS	Functional Literacy Examination		X	X	X							11	Criterion (Writing Sample)
NV	High School Proficiency Examination Program		X	X	X							11,12	Norm (Writing Sample)
NJ	Grade 11 Proficiency Test		X	X	X							11,12	Criterion (Writing Sample)
NM	High School Competency Examination	X	X	X	X	X	X					10	Criterion (Writing Sample)
NY	Regents Competency Tests (Regents Examination Program)		X (X)	X	X	X (X)	X (X)			(X)	(X)	9-11 (9-12)	Criterion (Writing Sample)
NC	Competency Testing		X	X								10	Criterion and Norm
OH	9th Grade Proficiency Testing		X	X	X			X				12	Criterion (Writing Sample)
SC	Basic Skills Assessment Program		X	X	X		X					3-10	Criterion (Writing Sample)
TN	Competency Testing	X	X									9-12	Criterion
TX	TX Assessment of Academic Skills		X	X	X	X	X					3-12 (excl. 9)	Criterion (Writing Sample)
VA	Literacy Passport Test		X	X	X							6-11	Criterion (Writing Sample)

Source: Bond, L., Braskamp, D. & van der Ploeg, A. (1995). State student assessment programs database: School year 1994-95. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers and North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

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LA=Language Arts M=Math R=Reading W=Writing SS=Social Studies
SC=Science CT=Citizenship EC=Essential Competencies E=English FL=Foreign Language

included in this count; it has defined its graduation exam as measuring "essential competencies."

Reliability of Information

Due to the complicated nature of retrieving specific accommodation information from documents provided by the states, agreement data were collected for the two raters who coded information on allowed accommodations (see Table 2). Information was coded within 52 accommodation types (e.g., extended time, Braille version, in study carrel) within four categories (format/equipment, setting, scheduling, and response). Agreement also was calculated by state to determine the clarity of the accommodation information provided by each state (see Appendix A). Overall agreement percentages ranged from 76.7% to 98.5%.

Table 2: Levels of Inter-Rater Agreement in Coding Accommodations

Area Rated	Mean	Range
Format	88.6	62.5 - 100.00
Setting	89.2	80.0 - 100.0
Scheduling	93.1	75.0 - 100.0
Response	90.2	69.2 - 100.0
Overall	90.3	76.7 - 98.5

The actual number of accommodations also affected the agreement rates (i.e., the more accommodations used, the more likely there would be disagreements). Thus, reliability for one state was low (76.7%); this state also allowed a large number of accommodations (33 of 52 possible). By comparison, the state for which agreement was highest was one of the states that allowed a relatively small number of

accommodations (10 of 52 possible). The number of accommodations allowed ranged from 3 to 36.

Findings

States that have graduation exams allow a variety of accommodations to be used when students with disabilities take the exams. In addition to listing specific accommodations, many of these states also have general considerations. One of the more common of these addresses the relationship between instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations.

The guidelines of seven states specifically state that testing accommodations must be consistent with accommodations used for the individual student in his or her typical classroom instruction. For example, Virginia's guidelines for testing students with disabilities state:

> Accommodations should be chosen based on what the student generally uses during instruction as identified in the student's IEP or management tool. These accommodations are those which the student uses on a daily basis and are not just used for participating in the LTP (Virginia State Board of Education, 1993).

Guidelines from the other states have similar statements about the alignment of testing accommodations and accommodations implemented in daily classroom instruction.

In addition to lists of accommodations, other kinds of information in state guidelines include elaboration of information, deference to other sources, and discussions of the decision-making process. For example, North Carolina includes a "considerations and instructions" section following the description of each accommodation. This additional information provides useful clarification for using modifications. Ohio's guidelines indicate that it only allows those accommodations accepted by

the test publisher. Georgia has provisions for out-of-level testing (as do some other states), and actively involves the student in decisions regarding accommodations. Several states require parental knowledge or participation in the decision-making process.

While most states separate information on eligibility for accommodations from their guidelines on accommodations, four states reiterate this point when presenting the accommodations guidelines. Florida's guidelines state:

> Modifications are authorized, when determined appropriate by the school district superintendent or designee, for any student who has been determined to be an eligible exceptional student pursuant to Rules 6A-6.0301 and 6A-6.0331, FAC, and has a current individual educational plan, or who has been determined to be a handicapped person pursuant to Rule 6A-19.001(6), FAC (Florida State Board of Education Rules, 1994).

For analysis purposes, this report organizes accommodations into four groups: format/equipment accommodations, setting/ administration accommodations, scheduling accommodations, and response accommodations.

Specifics

For analysis purposes, this report organizes accommodations into four groups: format/equipment accommodations, setting/administration accommodations, scheduling accommodations, and response accommodations. The percentage of states indicating that specific accommodations are acceptable is reported, but it does not account for those states that might have allowed the accommodation "with approval."

Format/equipment accommodations. This grouping included 15 separate accommodations that states allowed students to use in their high stakes assessments (see Table 3). The format accommodations listed most frequently by states included: *Braille and large print* (88.9%), *word processor/typewriter* (72.2%), *sign language* (61.1%),

Table 3: Format and/or Equipment Accommodations

State	Braille	Large Print	Read Aloud*	Magnif Equip	Amplif Equip	Noise Buffer	Templates	Abacus	Pointer	Sign Lang	Comm Device	Interprtr	Calculator	Audio/ Video Cassette	Word Processor/ Typewriter	Other
AL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X				with approval
FL	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X			X	optical to tactile
GA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X				X	optical to tactile/out of level testing
HI	X	X								X				X		
LA	X	X	X		X					X						with approval
MD	X	X	X		X						X	X	X	X	X	with approval
MI			X							X		X	X	X	X	
MS	X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X		X	X	special tables (wheelchair)
NV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X					X	pencil size/grip diameter
NJ	X	X			X		X			X		X			X	pencil size/grip diameter
NM																with approval
NY	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	tape recorder arithmetic tables amaneunsis
NC	X	X	X	X				X		X				X	X	
OH	X	X	X													in accordance with test publishers
SC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	loose leaf
TN	X	X		X			X			X				X	X	
TX	X	X	X				X			X					X	
VA	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	written directions

* Not permitted for Reading assessments.

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magnifying equipment and template (55.6%), and *audio/video tape and amplification equipment* (50.0%). The least frequently listed format accommodation was *use of a pointer* (16.7%).

Scheduling accommodations. This grouping included seven separate accommodations that states allowed (see Table 4). The scheduling accommodations listed most frequently by states included: *extended time* (66.7%), *multiple sessions* (50.0%), *with breaks* (44.4%), and *over multiple days* (33.3%). The least frequently listed scheduling accommodation was *breaks away from test area* (5.6%).

Setting/administration accommodations. This grouping included 14 separate accommodations (see Table 5). The setting/administration accommodations allowed most frequently by states included: *individual administration* (77.8%), *interpretation of directions* (66.7%), *small group* (66.7%), *student's home* (44.4%), *separate room* (38.9%), and *administration by other* (38.9%). The least frequently listed setting/administration accommodation involved adjusting the student's proximity to the test administrator (5.6%).

Most states did not indicate whether the testing results of students using accommodations would be included in the local or state statistics.

Response accommodations. This grouping included 12 separate accommodations (see Table 6). The response accommodations allowed most frequently by states included the use of: *proctor or scribe* (77.8%), *machine* (72.2%), *test booklet* (66.7%), *student dictation* (50.0%), and *Braille writer* (38.9%). The least frequently listed response accommodations were *sign language* (11.1%) and *lined paper* (11.1%).

Reporting

Most states did not indicate whether the testing results of students using accommodations would be included in the local or state statistics. However, Florida's guidelines specifically state that "scores for the following exceptional students are not included in any classroom, school, district, region, or state averages: Deaf, Hard-Of-Hearing, Specific Learning Disabled, Physically Impaired, Emotionally Handicapped, and Educable Mentally Handicapped" (Florida State

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Table 4: Scheduling Accommodations

State	With breaks	Time beneficial to student	Session stopped when student can no longer sustain activity	Over multiple sessions	Extended time	Breaks held away from testing area	Over multiple days	Other
AL	X	X	X					with approval
FL				X				
GA	X	X	X	X	X		X	
HI					X			must request accommodations
LA				X	X			IEP committee
MD	X	X		X	X	X	X	with approval
MI	X				X		X	alternate date
MS	X	X	X		X			
NV	X	X			X			
NJ	X				X		X	
NM								with approval
NY				X	X			
NC	X			X	X		X	
OH					X			
SC				X				
TN				X				
TX								
VA				X	X		X	

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Table 5: Setting/Administration Accommodations

State	Small Group	Carrel	Special Ed Class	Student Home	Seat Location	Lighting or Acoustcs	Individual Admin	Separate Room	Hospital	Proximity to Administrator	Admin by Others (i.e., sp ed teacher)	Teacher Facing Student	Interpret Directions	With Assistance (i.e., aide)	Other
AL	X	X	X	X	X		X				X	X	X		with approval
FL	X						X						X		
GA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	small room
HI															must request approval
LA	X				X	X	X						X		IEP committee
MD	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	
MI				X				X	X						
MS	X	X		X	X		X				X	X	X		familiar room
NV	X	X		X		X	X	X			X		X		
NJ	X		X		X	X	X	X			X		X		
NM															
NY	X					X	X	X					X		adaptive furniture
NC	X			X			X	X	X				X		
OH															in accordance with publisher
SC							X						X		appropriate to student's needs
TN	X						X				X		X		
TX							X								
VA	X			X		X	X	X	X				X		

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Table 6: Response Accommodations

State	Test Booklets	Proctor/ Scribe	Machine	Braille	Lined Paper	Large-Print Booklet	Pointing	Tape Recorder	Student Dictates	Sign Language	Comm. Device	Abacus	Other
AL	X	X	X										with approval
FL	X	X	X										
GA	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X		
HI													must request accommodation
LA	X	X		X		X							with approval (IEP)
MD	X	X	X				X	X	X	X			IEP & 504 students may respond to: small group audience, familiar small group audience, staff member, familiar staff member, or approved other
MI			X										
MS		X		X		X		X	X		X		
NV	X	X	X		X				X				modified pencil
NJ	X	X	X	X			X		X	X			modified pencil
NM													must request accommodation
NY	X		X					X			X	X	cues, calculator, arithmetic tables, amanuensis, space answer blocks
NC	X	X	X	X		X			X				
OH		X											
SC	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X		
TN	X	X	X										
TX		X	X						X				
VA	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	

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Board of Education Rules, 1994). Maryland and Mississippi were the only states among the 18 examined with high stakes exams for students to indicate that *all* scores would be included in reporting the final testing results.

Rating of Guidelines

Because state guidelines frequently are criticized for their vagueness (which contributes to variable implementation), an attempt was made to evaluate the guidelines in terms of clarity, inclusiveness, and organization. Each of the 18 state's accommodations guidelines were rated on a 5-point scale (see Table 7). The states with the highest ratings were Alabama (96.8% inter-rater agreement) and Georgia (93.4% inter-rater agreement), both with a rating of 4+. The states with the lowest ratings were Hawaii (96.9% inter-rater agreement), Michigan (96.9% inter-rater agreement), New Mexico (93.4% inter-rater agreement), Ohio (96.8% inter-rater agreement), and Texas (98.5% inter-rater agreement), all with a rating of 1. While the reliability for each of these states is high, those persons retrieving the information found that either the information presented was not clear, did not include enough information on how to include the largest number of students with disabilities, or the information provided was not well organized. The remaining states received ratings of 2 or 3.

Discussion

This rating process suggests that states should consider the manner in which information regarding accommodations is presented. The format of guidelines varied tremendously across states. During the process of analysis, several issues surfaced about the interpretation of allowed accommodations. In the area of format/equipment accommodations the issue was whether *sign language* and *interpreter* are the same accommodation (i.e., does allowing sign language as an accommodation imply that an interpreter is used; if so, does the use of an interpreter

Table 7: Reviewers' Rating of State Accommodation Guidelines

State	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average
AL	5	3+	4+
FL	3	1	2
GA	3+	5	4+
HI	1	1	1
LA	3	1	2
MD	1	5	3
MI	1	1	1
MS	1	3	2
NV	3	3	3
NJ	3	3	3
NM	1	1	1
NY	3	3	3
NC	3+	3+	3+
OH	1	1	1
SC	3	3	3
TN	3	1	2
TX	1	1	1
VA	3+	3	3+

Note: Policies were rated on a 5-point scale in the areas of clarity, inclusiveness, and organization.

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need to be stated or is it implied?). In the area of scheduling accommodations it was unclear whether *multiple sessions* automatically indicates *over multiple days* (i.e., can you have multiple sessions without allowing the test to be taken over multiple days?). In the area of setting accommodations the issue was whether *interpretation for directions* requires the use of an interpreter (i.e., sign language) or just having a person clarify directions. In the area of response accommodations, allowing students to point, dictate, or sign their responses would seem to necessitate the use of a proctor or a scribe.

Recommendations

Based on this analysis, we offer several recommendations for states considering the use of high stakes testing as part of graduation requirements:

- Use a consistent form or format to organize and to clarify acceptable accommodations. When possible, categorize the accommodations in some logical fashion.
- Clearly define and explain each accommodation.
- Indicate who should be involved in the decision-making process regarding allowable accommodations (e.g., student, parent/guardian, or IEP team).
- Keep information regarding high stakes testing separate from information regarding other tests.

Beyond these recommendations, we urge that states look at inconsistencies in policies across different states. These differences contribute to the lack of understanding of what test scores mean in states with graduation exams. Why is it considered acceptable in one state to allow the use of a proctor or scribe, while it is deemed unacceptable in another? The information on accommodations allowed by states also suggests that some accommodations are almost universally accepted (e.g., Braille version). For these accommodations, there is little need to

conduct research on their score comparability, unless of course they are being excluded from aggregations of scores. Clearly, the information in this report suggests a serious need for research related to several accommodations (e.g., templates, separate testing rooms, and testing over multiple days).

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Appendix A

Reliability Across Four Accommodation Areas

Appendix A: Reliability Across Four Accommodation Areas

State	Format	Setting	Scheduling	Response	Overall Reliability
Alabama	(10/16) 93.8%	(10/15) 93.3%	(4/8) 100%	(4/13) 100%	(28/52) = 54% 96.8%
Florida	(11/16) 81.3%	(3/15) 93.3%	(1/8) 87.5%	(3/13) 92.3%	(18/52) = 35% 88.6%
Georgia	(10/16) 93.8%	(12/15) 80%	(6/8) 100%	(8/13) 100%	(36/52) = 69% 93.4%
Hawaii	(4/16) 100%	(1/15) 100%	(2/8) 87.5%	(1/13) 100%	(8/52) = 15% 96.9%
Louisiana	(6/16) 87.5%	(6/15) 80%	(3/8) 75%	(5/13) 76.9%	(20/52) = 38% 79.9%
Maryland	(10/16) 93.8%	(10/15) 73.3%	(7/8) 100%	(8/13) 84.6%	(35/52) = 67% 87.9%
Michigan	(6/16) 100%	(3/15) 100%	(4/8) 87.5%	(1/13) 100%	(14/52) = 27% 96.9%
Mississippi	(11/16) 68.8%	(8/15) 73.3%	(4/8) 100%	(6/13) 69.2%	(29/52) = 56% 77.8%
Nevada	(10/16) 87.5%	(8/15) 93.3%	(3/8) 100%	(6/13) 84.6%	(27/52) = 52% 91.2%
New Jersey	(8/16) 81.3%	(8/15) 100%	(3/8) 87.5%	(8/13) 100%	(27/52) - 52% 92.2%
New Mexico	(1/16) 93.8%	(0/15) 100%	(1/8) 87.5%	(1/13) 92.3%	(3/52) = 6% 93.4%
New York	(13/16) 93.8%	(6/15) 73.3%	(2/8) 100%	(6/13) 84.6%	(27/52) = 52% 87.9%
North Carolina	(8/16) 87.5%	(6/15) 86.7%	(4/8) 87.5%	(6/13) 84.6%	(24/52) = 46% 86.6%
Ohio	(4/16) 93.8%	(1/15) 93.3%	(1/8) 100%	(1/13) 100%	(7/52) = 13% 96.8%
South Carolina	(15/16) 87.5%	(3/15) 93.3%	(1/8) 87.5%	(8/13) 84.6%	(27/52) = 52% 88.2%
Tennessee	(7/16) 93.8%	(4/15) 93.3%	(1/8) 100%	(3/13) 92.3%	(15/52) = 29% 94.9%
Texas	(6/16) 93.8%	(1/15) 100%	(0/8) 100%	(3/13) 100%	(10/52) = 19% 98.5%
Virginia	(13/16) 62.5%	(7/15) 80%	(3/8) 87.5%	(10/13) 76.9%	(33/52) = 63% 76.7%

Note: Ratios listed in parentheses ( ) above indicate the number of accommodations allowed in state policy guidelines, out of total number possible. Percentages indicate inter-rater reliability in identifying accommodations within written state guidelines.

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